



## Liaison Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: Citizenship and civic engagement—follow-up

Thursday 10 February 2022

4 pm

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Liaison Committee—members present: Lord Gardiner of Kimble (The Chair); Lord Collins of Highbury; Baroness Scott of Needham Market.

Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee—members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots (former Chair); Baroness Barker (former member); Lord Blunkett (former member); Baroness Eaton (former member).

Evidence Session No. 3

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 24 - 36

### Witnesses

**I:** Eddie Hughes MP, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Kevin Foster MP, Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, Home Office; Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education; Siobhan Jones, Director for Local Government and Communities, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

## Examination of witnesses

Eddie Hughes MP, Kevin Foster MP, Robin Walker MP and Siobhan Jones.

Q24 **The Chair:** May I extend a very warm welcome to this meeting of the Liaison Committee, which is also a follow-up for the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement? I very much welcome the three Ministers and the other witness introducing themselves and their portfolios, and then I will hand over to Lord Hodgson.

**Kevin Foster MP:** I am the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration in the Home Office.

**Robin Walker MP:** I am Member of Parliament for Worcester and Minister of State for School Standards.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** I am the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing. I am a very poor substitute for Minister Badenoch, who cannot be here.

**Siobhan Jones:** I am the director for local government and communities at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Thank you all very much for coming along. I need to make one declaration, which is that I am the author of a book called *Britain's Demographic Challenge*, some of which used information gathered and referred to in our original report in March 2019.

We have a lot to cover, so I would ask you to be brief, because we want to extract as much juice from your brain as we possibly can. Lord Blunkett, you are going to lead off.

Q25 **Lord Blunkett:** Yes, and I have declared interests on this agenda as well.

I would like to start by asking Robin Walker a question as the Minister of State at the Department for Education. I ought to say, by the way, that our witnesses have indicated a much more positive view of citizenship education than the department, which is extremely welcome. I have a rather esoteric question about the specialist leaders of education and the way in which that embraced citizenship teachers. We are interested to know what has happened; whether we have any stats on the number that have taken this up; and the cascade function that will ensure that there is quality delivery, whether or not they are specialist teachers, in a way that ensures that this subject area is taught well and is understood well.

**Robin Walker MP:** It is a very important question. I recognise that the committee will have welcomed the inclusion of specialist leaders of citizenship. It is worth pointing out that, since the committee published its report, appointment to the specialist leaders of education programme has closed as part of our wider efforts at developing teachers. We have looked to change our training and support offer to teachers to ensure that they receive high-quality training and development at every stage of their career, from initial teacher training to leadership qualifications.

Our recruitment and retention strategy published in 2019 set out a plan to better integrate school support through a new architecture comprising curriculum hubs, national professional qualifications and teaching school hubs. It is clear where the sector should look for expertise. Central to that is what we call the golden thread reforms in initial teacher training and the early career framework, which sets out a new entitlement to evidence-based support.

It is worth pointing out that, within that programme, the space where citizenship would be particularly supported is through NPQs and the behaviour and culture national professional qualification for people aspiring to leadership, which would definitely look at it from the perspective of the whole-school approach to things like teaching British values and citizenship.

In terms of the number of teachers, the information I have is that that has remained relatively consistent at about 4,000 specialist teachers in the profession. The point I would make is that citizenship goes more broadly than the specialist teaching community and, of course, is taught by a number of other teachers and leaders within schools. Certainly, what I see through the system is a strong interest in continuing to teach that and promote it.

**Lord Blunkett:** That is very helpful. Can I confirm that you are personally committed to ensuring that this is seen as a high-quality, major contribution to the education system?

**Robin Walker MP:** Yes, and from what I see visiting schools up and down the country it is now well embedded as something that the education system understands and supports, but, certainly, we want to see that continue.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** How do you distinguish between citizenship education and PSHE?

**Robin Walker MP:** PSHE is perhaps one element. Citizenship education, as your committee will have discussed, also involves that broader discussion of democracy. One of the areas in which we have taken it further in recent years is by the commitment to relationship education in schools, which also helps to support a better approach to citizenship and understanding the views of other groups. This is constantly evolving. PSHE is a subset of that broader concept of citizenship that we are talking about and that your committee encouraged us to look at.

Q26 **Baroness Barker:** Thank you very much, Minister. I think we drew a distinction between teaching about "me" and my personal development, and teaching about "us", and that is the framework that we want to return to. You mentioned 4,000 specialist teachers. The information that we have been given is that the figure is consistent but it is low. It has remained pretty constant. Why have the Government now stopped collecting data about trainee citizenship teachers, and why are there no targets for training?

**Robin Walker MP:** When we come to targets for training, we do not restrict in any way the numbers for subjects, including citizenship. The key areas where we tend to look for targets are in the EBacc subjects; and the bursary support that we provide has been targeted at the EBacc targets, particularly those in which there have been shortages. As you will be aware, that has been a particular challenge in areas such as physics and maths.

With regard to the recruitment of teachers, the fact that the number has stayed steady suggests that there has been adequate recruitment to replenish in that space, but this is also a question of the demand that schools have. Schools do not only teach citizenship through specialist teaching; it can be imparted through leadership and through teachers in a range of other subjects.

**Baroness Barker:** But would you agree that, with the bursary system being set up as it is to meet the most popular demand, this subject is always going to be the Cinderella?

**Robin Walker MP:** Not necessarily. We see over-recruitment in other subjects that have not attracted bursaries. In the primary space at the moment, we see plenty of people coming forward. Part of their training to become teachers in that space should be an understanding of citizenship and their role to support personal development among pupils. My own subject of history has never attracted bursary support, because more people have always come forward to teach history than we have needed to require a subsidy.

It is a question of targeting scarce resources to where they are most needed. In that respect, the EBacc is a sensible starting point, and focusing on shortage areas within that has always been the approach that the department has taken.

**Baroness Barker:** Thank you very much.

Q27 **Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Mr Foster, would you like to talk about civic education with regard to our new communities?

**Kevin Foster MP:** It is probably not the Home Office's role. We would not necessarily be out educating communities. Our role is processing the applications, setting things, and working together with our colleagues on things like counterextremism measures. It may perhaps be slightly more for colleagues in DLUHC and about councils generally. As you will know, we have the Life in the UK test. We have the Life in the UK handbook that people can study before they take that test. We are keen that those who are making that step to become a British citizen have a basic understanding of our history, our culture, our laws and the system of government here in the UK.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** We will come back to the Life in the UK test a little later, if we can. Baroness Scott will come in virtually.

Q28 **Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** That is right. I am here, but just

at some distance. Good afternoon. We have spent quite a lot of time this afternoon talking about the National Citizen Service. When the Minister replied to the committee's report, he talked about work that was ongoing between DfE and DCMS to improve the links on the National Citizen Service. I want to ask a two-part question. What progress was made as part of that initiative, and where do you think more work could still be done? Particularly for Mr Hughes, where do you see the links between the citizenship and civic agenda and levelling up?

**Robin Walker MP:** Can I start on the NCS? I look at this both from the perspective of a constituency MP who has engaged with the NCS a lot and with my schools hat on. There have been some quite exciting developments on that front with the NCS being plugged into the school system quite well, working with hundreds of colleges and sixth forms, particularly in the SEND and PRU sector, which are good sectors for them to be supporting. We have collaborated very closely with the NCS since the original report with the Moving Forward initiative in 2020, which was aimed at young people in the return to education. That supported 16,000 young people with activities, workshops and social action projects centred on improving well-being and keeping them engaged with education. Another area—which is my colleague Alex Burghart's portfolio—is the NCS Skills Booster programme, which about 400 schools are plugged into, and that initiative has reached about 60,000 young people.

One of the exciting areas for the future in this—and without stealing too much of Eddie's thunder—is the commitment that was revealed in the DLUHC levelling up White Paper about the national youth guarantee. Out of a figure of £560 million for youth services in England over the next three years, about £171 million is for the NCS to help deliver that guarantee. I am certainly looking forward to working with my colleagues at DCMS to make sure that that helps us to increase the opportunities for people in the school and college system.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** Robin highlights the fact that all departments will be contributing to the levelling up element in the levelling up White Paper that we saw the Secretary of State publish. In fact, basically, we need to help those left-behind areas where they have perhaps not had the investment that they should have had over recent times, and bring them up to the standard of other parts of the country. The idea that ability is equally distributed across the country but opportunity is not something that we will be addressing through the paper.

Part of the levelling up programme is the pride of place feeling. Whether that is the local area that you grow up in or pride in your country, in order to engender that in people we need to drive up engagement in the voting process. Over a number of years, the Government have done various things. In 2014, there was the idea of online voter registration. We saw for the 2019 general election the highest number of people registering to vote that we have ever had. There has been some fallback since then, but certainly it is possible to engage people in the process of voting, and that contributes to their feeling of being part of the country, part of its future and having a say in its future.

Different strands from the levelling up White Paper will be enacted across the country, starting from the very top with the Secretary of State chairing a Cabinet Committee. It was funny to see that Michael Gove had been in the department for barely three weeks and most of the Cabinet turned up in the department twice. He is an experienced man, who understands completely how the levers of government work, and he is well placed to be able to drive through that ambitious agenda. It is Michael at the top, but the paper identifies that we will have nine regional directors who will be a single point of contact for people across the region. We are bringing government a bit closer to the people in that respect. There are a number of things that we are going to do to deal with this.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** This is the paper—it is 293 pages long. We could not find citizenship education mentioned anywhere. Mr Walker, you talk about how important it is, but you are going to remove the data, so we are not going to know how many teachers are being trained. When we hear you talk about it but it is not mentioned in this paper, we might be a bit cynical.

**Robin Walker MP:** This is the department for levelling up's White Paper. It is about place-based initiatives; it is not about education across the piece. We are producing a schools White Paper later this year, and I am confident that you will see a focus in it on areas such as personal development, citizenship and some of the areas that this covers. It is important that this is not the sum of government policy; it is about the levelling up agenda.

Q29 **Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** I want to declare an interest as a trustee of Community Action Suffolk, which is the voluntary sector infrastructure body here in the county. One of the things that concerned us back in the day when the NCS was first formed, and now with regard to levelling up, is the question of rural areas and a sense that we always end up being forgotten. I wondered whether, in the specifics of the NCS and in the generality of levelling up, the Ministers could say something about how you ensure that rural areas do not get left behind.

**Robin Walker MP:** It is a very good point. I do not have direct responsibility for the NCS. I deal with where it intersects with schools. I cannot really comment on it from the perspective of directing its strategy. I also come from a rural county, and the work that I have seen in my constituency, which is largely urban, has involved bringing people together from the city and the countryside and getting people engaged with a range of local community initiatives that extend outside the city. In that respect, it is happening to an extent with the NCS, but there is always more that can be done.

With regard to the levelling up White Paper, I would point out that our education investment areas include a number of rural areas, including parts of Suffolk. We have looked to target areas of persistent educational disadvantage and underperformance, and that has targeted areas that may be rural and may be urban but are there on the basis of that

justification rather than perhaps in some of the more traditional government interventions, which I would be the first to argue have tended to plough money towards large cities at the expense of those of us in rural counties. That approach is better targeted, and it is slightly beside your point of exactly what we do with the NCS, but I hope that is helpful in addressing half the question.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** Can I at least add to part of the second half of the question? One of the statutory obligations that is included in the levelling up White Paper, and will be included in subsequent legislation, is the requirement for an annual report of performance against the parameters set out in the paper. That will give MPs and Peers the opportunity to challenge the Government against their performance, and that will apply across the country, whether rural towns or cities. Everybody will be covered.

Q30 **Baroness Eaton:** Before I ask my question, I need to declare my interest as a vice-president of the LGA, a past chairman and trustee of a charity called Near Neighbours, and as a DL in West Yorkshire.

During conversations and discussions we had about Ofsted, the point has been made that Ofsted does not seem to understand fully the difference between PSHE and citizenship education. How should Ofsted assess citizenship education, and are the Government content that their directive for assessment of delivering citizenship education is being followed?

**Robin Walker MP:** I know you have had Ofsted in front of you earlier on today. I have not seen what it said, so I do not want to contradict it. It is a separate government department. We work closely with it on the new inspection framework. That allows for a greater breadth in the emphasis of what it looks at within schools and allows it to look at the balance within the curriculum, which I think absolutely should include citizenship in that element. It can take deep dives into specific subjects during inspection. That should include citizenship for some schools. In addition, the focus that it should be putting on personal development gives it a remit within people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is one of the things that led to the demand for citizenship in the curriculum in the first place. When considering this, the inspectors should look at a variety of evidence, including how curriculum subjects such as citizenship contribute to that personal development.

With Ofsted, there is sometimes a difference between some of the perception and some of the reality. I have had complaints from schools that they have been overly focused on aspects relating to the relationships, sex and health education directive, and they feel that that is being put at the expense of other more academic areas. I actually think it is probably a good thing that Ofsted has taken those issues seriously and made sure that schools stick to those standards. There is always a balance to strike with the inspectorate. It will sometimes do things that may not necessarily be popular but can be right when it is challenging people on the content of some of this.

**Baroness Eaton:** How will the framework that you referred to make sure that there is the clarity of difference between citizenship education and personal development? There are overlapping things, but there needs to be clarity about the purpose.

**Robin Walker MP:** There does. It allows for that because of the balance between it looking at the breadth of the curriculum on the one hand, which includes all the subjects that are taught, citizenship included within that, and personal development on the other. Some of that is in there. I know that your committee called originally for it to undertake a review of the provision in this space. I understand that it is due to do some work this summer to establish the quality of personal development, so I would encourage it to look at how citizenship plays its part in that.

**Baroness Eaton:** You mentioned deep dive, but we were not very clear in the response we received how and when that deep dive is ever undertaken. Would that initiative come from the Department for Education, or purely from Ofsted?

**Robin Walker MP:** It is something that Ofsted should lead on, but I would be happy to raise the committee's concerns with Her Majesty's chief inspector when we next meet. We meet on a regular basis, and I am always keen to make sure that she hears about issues that are of concern to colleagues in Parliament. Certainly, on that perspective, I will ask the question about deep dives in this space.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** It would be very helpful, since we are going to publish our follow-up report by the end of March, if you could accelerate that process and let us have your follow-up so that we can make sure that we are in no way misrepresenting you. That would be most unfair.

**Baroness Barker:** Can I communicate two specific concerns that we have? One is that taking citizenship, which is a pretty well misunderstood concept, and adding it into RSE, which is well understood but highly controversial, is not a wise strategy, in our view.

Secondly, can we pick up a point from our earlier report, which is that Ofsted is perhaps uniquely the body that is supposed to search and find the evidence on citizenship teaching? Nobody else can do that job.

**Robin Walker MP:** I will pass both of those on. If I may, I will ask HMCI to write to the committee.

**Baroness Barker:** Thank you.

Q31 **Lord Blunkett:** I wonder if we can have a very quick reflection by the Ministers present, bearing in mind the time constraints, about the long-term benefit of investment in citizenship education and the civic journey, not just for social cohesion but for capacity building within communities, so that the levelling up White Paper is not about doing things to people but with people. Much to the chagrin of my colleagues, I have a great deal of time for Michael Gove, so I am hoping that you might translate

back that we want to build from the bottom up, not the top down.

This is for the Home Office. Is it not an irony that we spend a lot of time and effort, sometimes good, sometimes not—quite rightly, because I was in charge of initiating this—getting the teaching of citizenship into the booklet and then into the necessary follow-through in the examination for those who want to become naturalised citizens, but not on our own citizens? Do we all not find this somewhat ironic?

**Kevin Foster MP:** Perhaps if I can comment from a Home Office perspective, there is certainly a logic and a long-term dividend in educating people about fundamental British values and citizenship at an earlier age. This was one of the things I reflected on in preparation for this meeting.

If we look at the growing challenges with things like far-right extremism, without going into recent incidents where we have also seen extreme misogyny that provoke someone into particular actions, there is a job to be done with our own citizens in ensuring that these values are their values and people really understand what our society is about. We have all experienced the toxic debate that can be on social media where people may live in an echo chamber and start thinking that particular views are views everyone holds, when actually they are not and they are absolutely against the fundamental values we have in society.

That is why it is very important in our education system, as has been reflected on and then coming towards the Home Office's interests, that people are having some of that thinking challenged from an early age so that they do not believe that what someone in an echo chamber on social media might think and agree with them on is a fundamental value or a view that the vast majority of us share.

**Robin Walker MP:** You are absolutely right that it is a long-term investment. I very much agree with that. One of the areas where this can make a contribution is in the area of sustainability and climate change. We see that young people have a huge interest in that. Whenever I go into schools, I invariably get questioned on these issues by student councillors, elected representatives of students, eco-committees, and so on and so forth, and there is a really active citizenship drive going on through that space that we should foster and encourage.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** Can I touch briefly on the bottom-up, top-down element? As part of our drive beyond Whitehall, we are desperately trying to move people out of London who work for government as civil servants. We have our second head office in Wolverhampton where we have now recruited over 200 staff. I get the opportunity whenever I can to work there at least one day a week. The point is to try to make sure that, when you are doing things "with" rather than "to", people can see government close to them and that the government departments are not just something that they see on the telly in London but they can see that in their local area. We have done a very good job of recruiting more staff across the country.

Also, devolution will play a strong part in this. We have seen sometimes that it does not work well for us as the Conservative Government, you might say, with regard to Andy Burnham with his control of Manchester, but by the same token we are being brave and continuing to roll out devolution to make sure that people feel that that legislation is closer to them in terms of the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Is there any follow-up to all that?

**Lord Blunkett:** I was tempted to say that Teesside seems to be doing fairly well out of it, and North Yorkshire on education investment areas, unlike Sheffield because it is a city.

I would like to press the point that the joined-up approach between departments—we touched on this in an earlier session—in terms of co-ordination of action across government, which we recommended back in 2018, is really important to getting this right. We all agree this afternoon that this is an important area, but no one actually owns the joined-upness about it. I hope that on the back of the missing element of the levelling up White Paper you might take this back to the department to see whether we can do a bit better.

Q32 **Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** We would like to take a specific example. We have here the independent review of the Human Rights Act, an important issue but a controversial one, and it is going to the Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Justice. The top recommendation is that serious consideration should be given by government to developing an effective programme of civic and constitutional education in school, universities and adult education. Perhaps the three of you could explain to us how this goes from the Ministry of Justice and spreads through government in a way that does not just drop down between the cracks.

**Robin Walker MP:** I would start from the perspective that a lot of what this committee originally recommended, and which has been picked up across government and engaged with—the approaches to teaching civic engagement and democracy as a fundamental British value—is there in schools and is happening in schools up and down the country. I see many excellent examples of that. We have probably all seen in our work as parliamentarians the great work of the parliamentary education services in bringing in schools from all over the country and fostering that approach. There is some really good work to highlight in that space first and foremost.

When something like that is being picked up by a particular government department such as the MoJ, we all have the responsibility to engage with that. Some of what Michael Gove has been given the job of doing at the department for levelling up is about better co-ordinating that effort. He has come from a co-ordinating role in another department to a co-ordinating role in his new one.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** What would you like to tell us about this, Eddie?

**Eddie Hughes MP:** I was going to endorse what Robin said with regard to the point about the Cabinet Committee for levelling up. It will focus on one specific area each time it meets and it will have the opportunity to discuss cross-departmental responsibilities such as the one you have described.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Are you really asking this committee to believe that this serious report done by serious people makes that recommendation and that it is unnecessary? Essentially, Mr Walker, you are saying that there is a perfectly good programme going on anyway.

**Robin Walker MP:** No, I think there is a good programme going on. We can always do more to enhance it and strengthen it. We should take seriously the fact that the committee feels the need to make that report. I would make the point, though, that it was not necessarily making it on the basis of having looked at what was going on within the education system. There is a lot going on in this space. We are absolutely happy to work with other government departments to make sure that we address the concerns that the committee may have.

Q33 **Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Can we push on then? We remain very concerned about interdepartmental co-ordination. We recommended that there should be a single cross-government champion in this area, covering all the areas that you three gentlemen are covering. That is why you have very kindly come along this afternoon, for which we are extremely grateful. We were originally told by James Brokenshire and later told by Lord Greenhalgh that the Safe and Integrated Communities Inter-Ministerial Group was doing this role. Then we were told that the IMG has not met since 2019. Are we therefore supposed to assume that in three years no meetings meant that everything is fine, or what is happening?

**Eddie Hughes MP:** I feel slightly defensive inasmuch as that feels like a very long time ago, and yet a tremendous amount has happened since then, not least that we have changed Prime Minister. We have been through a period of turbulence. We have had Brexit. We have had two years of the pandemic, and the machinery of government has been considerably more focused in the previous two years in helping us to get through the pandemic. Now, we hope, depending on what the Prime Minister announces in a week or so, we are letting go of the final restrictions and looking forward to a post-COVID world.

My initial answer is that the Government have been hugely distracted. Secondly, the interconnectivities between government departments through COVID have genuinely strengthened things. If you would indulge me for literally one minute, as the Minister for Rough Sleeping I would say that rough sleeping is not just a DLUH issue; it is health and housing, effectively. I have been attending meetings with Health Ministers, and many charity groups are pleased to see joined-upness going on across government. We have been working well with the MoJ in working with prisoners, supporting them when they leave prison, and things like that. All this connectivity has been built on during the

pandemic. So although you may feel that a Minister with specific responsibility was necessary, I would say that we are doing a very good job with the structures that we have in place at the moment.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** So your evidence to us is that it is quite okay now.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** I would agree with what Robin said, which is a fundamental principle of government. Even in the things we are doing well, there is always room for improvement.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Baroness Eaton?

**Baroness Eaton:** Sorry, is it my turn? I was thinking about rough sleeping.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** We will talk another time.

Q34 **Baroness Eaton:** Yes, I would be very interested in discussing that subject with you.

There has been a lot of attention and comment over time about the citizenship test. Have the Government set up an advisory group to conduct a comprehensive review of the citizenship test, focusing on the key knowledge that supports citizenship in various forms, including particularly becoming an active citizen, and if not, why not?

**Kevin Foster MP:** To be clear, no. That is partly for the reasons that have just been outlined. The Government have had quite a lot on their agenda the last couple of years that we would not have predicted two or three years ago and that none of us in this room could have sensibly predicted.

Also, compared to the past, we are now a good way through probably one of the biggest reforms of our immigration system in the last 20 years. That leads into naturalisation and citizenship, and is not just the ending of free movement, which a lot of people focus on, but the massive reforms that we have been bringing through a wider migration system. We were clear that we were not just going to extend the migration system for non-EEA nationals to EEA nationals and leave it at that.

For example, we started with the new student routes. We have had the new skilled worker route. There are a couple more routes that will be launched later this year, which again bring together some routes and simplify them. It is not just about rebranding or rebadging some of the routes we have had. It has been a very fundamental go-through, including things such as the use of biometrics and fully online applications for some visas. We created the British nationals overseas route this time last year, which again includes a fully online application system.

As regards our work schedule, we have wanted to go through it more logically, starting with those applying for leave to remain. We are now starting to move towards changes in the settlement area. We have a major programme of reform of how to sponsor people to be here under

our immigration system. We will then move on to the family area. We will then see the final step in people's journeys, from being someone who has not been to the UK before to being someone who has made the UK their home—and many people can make fantastic contributions. Then they want to make that step to being a citizen, which partly links with us looking at whether there will be opportunities to deliver simplification benefits by altering some of the primary legislation that currently dictates some of the tests we have to apply.

To be clear, that is not going back to the era of things like being born in the UK. For example, we have to test lawful residence for a period, which, as members of the committee may know, has brought up issues with things like comprehensive sickness insurance, and other stuff, which have not been particularly helpful and do not particularly go to any great objectives that we have.

We will then consider a more in-depth review of the Life in the UK test and the handbook that goes with it, potentially as part of that wider package of change on citizenship.

**Baroness Eaton:** Will you be able to guarantee to us some method of encouraging and pointing out that part of being a British citizen is to be an active citizen in citizenship ways?

**Kevin Foster MP:** Absolutely. Obviously, we have to make sure that people do not see it as a tick-box exercise. As we perceive it, we might see an active citizen as someone who votes in elections or stands for Parliament. Someone else might perceive it as being part of a community group, part of a residents' association, or doing something for a charity. How do we make sure that it is both sensible and manageable but also not very much driven by a tick box "Yes, I'm an active citizen. I vote in my council election once a year"? That is great, and taking part in elections is a very important part of being a British citizen, but it is not the end of being an active citizen; nor is judging your commitment by how many times you turn up to a polling station.

From the point of view of the Home Office, we are looking at some of the lessons learned from the Windrush scandal. What comes out of that in the citizenship test, and in people's knowledge of Britain as it is today, is how we should very much respect and recognise the contribution of the Windrush generation. For us, that is a key part of our change process as we react to the Wendy Williams report.

**Baroness Eaton:** Will there be a co-ordinating group to deliver this? It has received a lot of criticism in the past, so one would hope that it would be more productive and sensible.

**Kevin Foster MP:** We will always have a debate about exactly what is in the book and what people are tested on. We think it is right that people have a basic knowledge but that they do not have to go off and research reams of stuff. It has to be clear that what they need to know is in a document they can study, and which gives an introduction and, hopefully,

stimulates people to want to look further into our history and find out more.

Of course, everyone will have their own views on the key parts of British history that we should include, and what perspectives should be in there. Obviously, the Windrush generation brings a very different perspective to British history than some others may want to see emphasised in the handbook. How far back do we go? What are the key moments? The Acts of Union are key moments in the constitution, but there are other things such as Windrush that affected our society more today in terms of those who are here and the many communities who make Britain their home.

We will certainly be looking to consult widely as we do it. I do not want to make commitments to set up particular groups or things, given that we already have quite a number, but we will consider whether it would be appropriate to have one at the time we take it forward, and we will obviously keep the House updated.

**Robin Walker MP:** You talked a lot about cross-government co-ordination in this space, and one good example at the moment, which is a group that I sit on with Eddie, among others, is the work that we are doing on Operation Warm Welcome for the Afghans. Within that, some very good citizenship resources have been produced to help those people to settle in. Morley College has worked with us as a department to help to produce and support that. I wanted to give that as a good example of where cross-government co-ordination is helping in this regard.

**Eddie Hughes MP:** It is quite a challenge with regard to the number of people that we are talking about. Associated with that is the challenge of finding long-term accommodation. That will be distributed across the country, so it is incredibly important that we work very closely with the families and the receiving areas to make sure that there is that good introduction to life in the UK. Warm Welcome seems like a very fitting title for the programme.

Q35 **Baroness Barker:** I realise that quizzes are a somewhat sensitive issue this week, but I guarantee that this question was put in well before that.

The Life in the UK test has been fair game for a lot of criticism over time. I think I am right that we are about 20 years into the Life in the UK test. What evidence have we built that it actually assists people to become active citizens in Britain? After 20 years, we must have some data. Perhaps we will go with that question first, and then I will come on to my next one.

**Kevin Foster MP:** It has always been very hard to get solid data that someone, for example, was more inspired to take part in elections because they learned something about the history of democracy via studying for the Life in the UK test than to test specifically whether somebody has been a better citizen because they sat and did this.

We believe it has a valuable role. It was first devised back in 2005. That goes back some time before I was in the Home Office, and I am

conscious that memories of the Home Office go back much further in this room. We genuinely believe that it plays a positive role and gives people an insight into our history, and we think it is important that people have a basic understanding of Britain as it is, as it was, and as it has developed. It can never be a complete solution, and neither would we expect it to be. It gives a baseline. The pass rates are relatively high, which indicates that people who study it study the handbook and go forward. But it will always be very hard to test what people got from it for the rest of their life having passed through it, because in the end it is quite subjective.

**Baroness Barker:** You have to pay a lot of money to go through it and it is a lot of work. I am just surprised that after 20-odd years we have not made any use of the data.

**Kevin Foster MP:** You say "a lot of money". The actual test cost is 50 quid and the handbook price from the Stationery Office is £12.99, but I think you can get it for 9 quid online today. I would not describe that as a particularly large amount of money.

**Baroness Barker:** But it is quite an onerous thing to do, having looked at it myself.

**Kevin Foster MP:** It is 24 multiple choice questions in 45 minutes, based on one book that you need to read. Inevitably, there will be some who are looking to become citizens who have some advantages. Citizens of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Jamaica find questions on our Head of State, for example, slightly easier to answer than perhaps some others do. Again, the figures show that most people manage to pass it. Most people find it an interesting thing to look at. Again, it will always be very difficult to measure what impact it has for the rest of your life having studied this particular test, given that we are talking about concepts. For example, someone will not get an extra salary for having passed this test.

**Baroness Barker:** No, but it was put forward as being part of a system of improving citizenship and access to citizenship in this country. Lord Greenhalgh wrote to us on 28 April 2020 saying that it would be reviewed. You have set out the sequencing of the work programme in the Home Office. Roughly, when can we expect it to be reviewed?

**Kevin Foster MP:** We are clear that we are not planning to review whether we have the Life in the UK test or the concept of the test; it is about the content. Clearly, things need to be updated. We are now 20 years past the millennium, for example, and we may wish to incorporate things that we did not incorporate 10 or 15 years ago.

Our expectation is that probably later this year we will move towards the stage of starting to look at citizenship and reform. As I say, this is not just about us having a look at the handbook. This is about us looking more widely at the process through which people apply and how they supply certain evidence and, as I have touched on, we are considering

whether some of the current legal tests that are in primary legislation could be amended to make a slightly more logical process for people who have recently been granted ILR, for example.

**Lord Blunkett:** I hope, Chair, that some of the multiple answer questions might get us off the idea that somebody seeking citizenship in the country might believe that William Blake was a golfer. I happen to like his poem *London*, but I think if I came from Afghanistan I would be hard put to answer the multiple series question that incorporated that.

**Kevin Foster MP:** It is why we say to people that they will not be tested on anything that is not in the handbook. We have to have an element of asking people about things and making the test have elements of culture and society, but we would not, for example, expect somebody from Afghanistan to learn about every British poet to pass this test—only about the information that is in the handbook.

**Lord Collins of Highbury:** If you are reviewing it, how might you consult? One of the other positions I hold is shadow Foreign Office Minister and, obviously, I am constantly looking at how we present ourselves as a country to others, particularly when we talk about our values. On a cross-party basis we work with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. It just struck me that, actually, the work we do abroad is not adequately reflected in what we do at home. I just wondered whether you would be looking to consulting the FCDO, the WFD and people like that. These people come from countries where they will often be hearing about our values, and the test does not seem to reflect any of that.

**Kevin Foster MP:** Again, we are keen to get a broad base of opinion when we review the book, not just from within the Home Office, or for that matter across government, but from different communities. There are communities here in the UK. For example, I did a couple of visits recently to groups who have been supporting us with the Windrush compensation scheme. They have a very different perspective on British society compared to, let us say, what I grew up with, as a family that has lived in Devon for most of the last 100 years.

That is partly how we reflect some of that without it becoming a voluminous tome that requires a level of study that is disproportionate to the test that we are asking people to sit. We are very keen on perception and how people perceive us. When you meet the Windrush generation groups and look at their perception of Britain when they were invited to come here in 1959-60, they had quite an interesting perspective in coming to the UK at that time. It is a very different perspective than perhaps many of us would have sitting around this table. It is a very important perspective in helping to understand how they felt about what then happened to them and their loved ones at a later date in the Windrush scandal.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** When you do the analysis, if you take the booklet and run through it with your sub-editor's red pencil, you will remove quite a lot of the questions. Some of them do not take you in

any real direction. As Baroness Barker has said, it is an easy hit, and I am not trying to say anything now, but I urge you when you come to review it, which should happen soon, to make sure that you do it with a degree of reality and cynicism.

**Kevin Foster MP:** How we get something that is fair and does not become subjective in this type of area will always be a challenge. I accept that there may be some odd multiple choice examples that might end up as test questions. We are also very clear that it needs to remain fair and that people do not feel that they are being put to a more subjective analysis, which can have certain consequences.

Q36 **Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Our last question is about institutional memory. When we had our first report we found lots of initiatives—some good, some less good, some downright bad—but nobody was picking them up and seeing what was working and what was not working. We had what we called initiative-itis. Siobhan Jones has so far not had a chance to say anything. Since you are the keeper of the flame, would you like to tell us how we make sure that we build on what we have done well in the past, and discard what we did less well?

**Siobhan Jones:** I am certainly happy to have a go at answering that question. One of the initiatives across government is to try to strengthen our approach to evaluation. Colleagues may be aware that there is a team in the Cabinet Office picking up that very point. In some of my areas, we are trying to ensure that we put much greater focus on doing really strong evaluations and are using that to learn.

As the Ministers have said, there are obviously areas we can improve, and we still need to make sure that we are learning from what has gone before, but we are also trying to do more to track the results of what we have achieved in tracking the outcomes.

A lot of the initiatives are still under way and still delivering. They may not be talked about all the time, but in my area there are a lot of things that are still happening on the ground, where funds are making a real difference. In my own area there is the community champions work, the Afghanistan work that is going on now, and the integration funds. There is a lot that still goes on that may not be trumpeted in every White Paper but is still making a difference on the ground and actually happening to communities.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** Do the Ministers wish to add anything to that?

**Robin Walker MP:** I just think that institutional memory is one of the reasons why we have the House of Lords, so it is very useful to be challenged on it.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts:** If I may say so, flattery will get you almost everywhere. Thank you all for coming, and I will hand back to Lord Gardiner.

**The Chair:** Thank you to the three Ministers and all witnesses for this meeting.